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"FOLK PSYCHOLOGY" AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

INTRODUCTION

A major impediment to the development of a science of psychology is the existence in ordinary non-technical discourse of a pre-scientific language/theory which is in constant use by the man-and-woman in the street when they describe their own and other people's psychological states and explain their own and other people's behavior. This is what is known in contemporary philosophical parlance as "folk psychology." The psychologist cannot afford to ignore folk psychology in the way a physicist can ignore folk physics. For folk psychological descriptions and explanations given by subjects and clients are part of the data of psychology, in a way that folk physical descriptions and explanations are not part of the data of physics.

Recent discussions of folk psychology within the overlapping fields of the philosophy of mind and cognitive science have focused on two issues:

- (1) Is folk psychology a naturally-occurring theory which, like other scientific theories, must either be accepted or rejected in the light of the best available empirical evidence?
- (2) Whether or not it is properly described as a theory, can we and, if so, should we avoid using the language and concepts of folk psychology for the purposes of psychological science?

Four different positions can be distinguished, depending on the answer that is given to these two questions. Of the five articles in this section each of the first four defends a different one of these four possible positions:

- (1) Nick Chater and Mike Oaksford defend a version of the so-called 'eliminative materialist' position, advocated by philosophers such as Stephen Stich and Paul and Patricia Churchland who think that folk psychology is a genuine theory, but one that has been discredited by contemporary scientific evidence.

- (2) Barry Smith expounds and defends the view advocated by Jerry Fodor who claims not only that folk psychology is a genuine theory, but that it is one that science can only refine, not replace.
- (3) Ullin Place invokes conceptual analysis in defence of the behaviorist position which holds that folk psychology is a language rather than a theory, but one which, for a variety of reasons, is unsuitable for scientific purposes.
- (4) Graham Richards defends what may be thought of as the Wittgensteinian position which denies that folk psychology is a theory, but differs from the behaviorist in thinking that no alternative 'scientific' language is possible which could act as a substitute.

The section concludes with a discussion by Elizabeth Valentine of the issues raised in the four preceding papers.

